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# Householders

IN

## DANGER

FROM

### The Populace.

BY EDWARD GIBBON WAKEFIELD, ESQ.

THE object of these pages is to show that the householders of London are in danger from the populace, to explain the nature of the existing danger, and to suggest a measure for its removal.

All history proves that great political changes, whether for good or evil, are liable to numerous accidents; that the general tendency of such accidents is, by disturbing the course of transition, to convert peaceful change into revolution; and that the liability to mischievous accidents increases with the duration of the unsettled period. In this respect, the evidence of history is confirmed by *à priori* considerations. A great political change necessarily affects many interests. The prospect of it, and still more its progress, create uncertainty, besides violently exciting the passions of hope, fear, jealousy, hatred, and anger. With these new feelings,—new at least in object and degree,—comes a derangement of the ordinary course of business. A derangement of the ordinary course of business, resulting from uncertainty and excitement, aggravates itself by augmenting the force of its causes. Thus, at length, pain-

ful circumstances arise, which, though the origin of them might be traced by a calm observer, the vulgar deem accidents, because they are unusual and were not expected. Circumstances of an unusual, more especially if they be of a painful nature, dispose men to doubt and hesitation. Thus the accidents attending a political change tend to interrupt and disturb the progress of that change, and, by throwing every thing into confusion, to convert the change into a revolution. It were needless to add that the chances of mischievous accidents must be in proportion to the delay which takes place in consummating a political change; and that the risk of violence in the change is greatest when uncertainty and excitement are at their height.

A specimen of the kind of accidents that occur in the progress of political changes has been lately exhibited at Bristol. If events similar to the Bristol riots should occur in the capital, which is the centre of commerce and the seat of government, who will say that we shall escape a revolution? But this is a question which I do not pretend to examine. Every one

will acknowledge that the symptoms of revolution, as distinguished from peaceful change, have lately increased in number. I propose to deal with but one of those symptoms,—confining my statements and remarks to the metropolis,—viz. the disposition of certain classes of the people to produce a state of anarchy.

Sir Francis Burdett says that there are no classes in this country; that we are all—Englishmen. Well, but what was the occasion on which Sir Francis Burdett propounded this doctrine? When presiding at a meeting of which the express object was to create a union, for a single purpose, of certain distinct classes of the people. A metaphorical constituent of Sir Francis Burdett, at a late meeting of Westminster electors, by way of illustrating the doctrine of his representative, said, “Look at the fishes of the sea: some are large, some small; some swim near the surface, others at the bottom of the water; but are not they all fishes?” He forgot to add that the several classes of fishes subsist by devouring each other. Further, with what object did Sir Francis Burdett deny the existence of classes in England? Manifestly for the purpose of persuading a *class* amongst the working *class* to join the middle *class*. The occasion, therefore, on which, and the motive with which, Sir Francis Burdett declared that we are all of one class, abundantly prove the contrary.

As there can be no doubt that this fallacy or sophism was put forth with a good object, so I have dwelt on it to excuse myself for pursuing an opposite course. The populace of London are a class. That the populace of London are at this moment bent on producing anarchy, I shall endeavour to prove,

with the view of putting on their guard those who would suffer most by a state of anarchy, viz. the class of householders. It would be impossible to make out the proof, to warn the householders of their danger, and arm them against it, without resorting to classification. The reader must decide whether the end—the preservation of tens of thousands of estimable families from some bands of robbers and ruffians—justify the means,—a plain statement of what I believe to be matter of fact.

Even of the housekeepers some classification is necessary. I address myself to those who keep houses, not those who own mansions. In case the Bristol riots were repeated in London, the inhabitants of Grosvenor-square could run away from the danger. They pass but a portion of the year in London, and that portion without any absolute necessity. Most of them would be none the worse or less happy, after all, if they were kept out of London for a twelve-month. Of their entire property only a small proportion ever lies in their town-houses; and of that small proportion they could carry away with them the most valuable part. Those objects, above all, which are dearest to men, under whatever sized roofs—their wives and children—might be easily removed and kept out of harm's way till the storm had blown over. Not so with the mere housekeeper, whose constant residence is London; whose business or profession fixes him in one spot; whose property is, for the most part, under his own roof; and who, in case of danger to his wife and children, must either send them away unprotected, or go with them, leaving his property in jeopardy, or keep them with him to take their chance of the chapter of accidents. This

is the class of persons that I would be understood to mean by the term householders.

No single word designates correctly the class of persons from whom I conceive the housekeepers to be in danger. It is for the sake of brevity, therefore, that I speak of those persons as *the populace*. By the populace of London I would be understood to mean a numerous body who, though subdivided into classes, have, or suppose themselves to have, an interest opposite to that of the community at large, and who may be described as the enemies of the protective laws by which society is upheld.

Concerning the numbers, designs, and means of this body, the government, I suspect, has but vague and uncertain information. Indeed, as the class of persons in question are deeply interested in concealing the maturity of their designs, and as such designs may be entertained or even pursued without any tangible conspiracy, the most diligent government could not easily have obtained accurate information on the subject. Perhaps nothing but a concurrence of favourable accidents could have enabled any one to acquire such knowledge. But, be that as it may, if any one had acquired such knowledge, his plain duty would be to communicate it to the government in one way or other.

A concurrence of favourable accidents has bestowed upon me, with hardly any exertion on my part, what I believe to be accurate information concerning the present numbers, designs, and means of the London populace. For two reasons I have decided to make that information public, rather than lay it secretly before the government: first, because were the alternative to be the burning

of London, I should not like to take the appearance of a government spy; and, secondly, because I conscientiously doubt whether the government could effectually use the information conveyed to them, without submitting it to the public, and calling on the public to assist them by the measure of prevention which is suggested at the conclusion of this tract.

The class whom, for want of a better word, I have designated as the populace, and whom I shall presently shew to be bent on producing a state of anarchy, with a view to plunder and the destruction of the rights of property, may be subdivided into three classes. First, COMMON THIEVES. Secondly, Persons whose extreme poverty, frequent unsatisfied hunger, and brutalizing pursuits, render them as dishonest as thieves; many of whom are, indeed, occasional thieves; most of whom constantly associate with thieves; and of whom not one would neglect an opportunity to enjoy other men's goods by force. These may be called the RABBLE. Thirdly, A body, principally work-people, though of the working-class they form but a very small proportion,—disciples of Owen and followers of Hunt, who meet and proclaim themselves at the Rotunda, in Blackfriars' Road. These I shall call DESPERADOES.

The reader will expect to be told what was the concurrence of favourable accidents that brought me acquainted with these several classes of anarchists. It was in Newgate that I acquired a knowledge of the state of crime and of criminals in the metropolis. No one can acquire a correct knowledge of the state of crime without learning a good deal of the state of misery which produces crime. Let any one become

thoroughly acquainted with the state of misery that exists in London, and so surely, if he have common humanity and much leisure, he will turn his attention to the means by which the condition of the poorest class may be improved. Seriously engaged in an inquiry of this nature, I have been led to associate with the poorest and most degraded of the population, with members of the working-class who had a deep sense of the evils of their condition, and with others who, for selfish objects, sought to inflame the discontent of the miserable. Thus I am enabled to speak of my own knowledge concerning the common thieves, the rabble, and the desperadoes of the metropolis.

Placing all these under the general head of populace, it is now time to describe the peculiarities of each class, with respect to its designs against the householders, and its means of carrying those designs into effect.

First, of the Common Thieves.—Though a diligent government might easily obtain correct information as to the number of common thieves in London, it may be doubted whether the present or late Home Secretary would offer a conjecture on that point; so profoundly ignorant has our government long remained of the state of crime in the metropolis. But something like an estimate may be formed by combining the following facts.

Within a few miles of St. Paul's there are eight criminal prisons; viz. Tothill-fields, Clerkenwell, Giltspur-street Compter, Horse-monger-lane Jail, Newgate, Cold-bath-fields House of Correction, Brixton Penitentiary, and the great Millbank Penitentiary. The prisoners in these jails are, for the most part, common thieves, and

but a very small proportion of them are confined for crimes committed beyond the suburbs of London. From several of these prisons, "draughts," as they are called, are frequently made to the hulks, of persons sentenced to transportation; yet nearly all these prisons are at all times reported by the magistrates to be "crowded." Some thousands, though a general, will not be found an exaggerated estimate of the average number of persons constantly detained in these prisons; and further, every London magistrate bears witness that the prison-room of the metropolis is quite inadequate to the demand for it. If London were blessed with an efficient criminal police, the great number of prisoners in the London jails might be taken as one proof that the number of criminals not in prison was but small. The truth, however, is just the reverse of this hypothesis; for it would be difficult to imagine any system of punishment more defective than that which is administered in the British metropolis. The prisons are numerous and filled, though scarcely any pains are taken to fill the prisons:—it follows that the criminal population, from which so large a prison population is so carelessly derived, must be immense. In support of this conclusion I may add, that during the night of the 9th of November, 1830, when it had been expected that the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel would accompany the King to Guildhall, I saw in various parts of the town several bodies of thieves, amounting in number, as I calculated at the time, to at least 7000. Further, when confined in Newgate myself, and when my attention was particularly directed to the subject, I formed a calculation



of the number of thieves always at large in London, estimating it at 30,000. Though I have mislaid the particulars of that estimate, I remember that it was founded on facts carefully verified; and my opinion of its accuracy has been confirmed by subsequent observation of the class of people to which it related.

In order to judge of the actual designs of any class of people, one ought to know what is their ordinary temper.

Common thieves are generally reckless of the distant future: they look forward but a short way, and their highest desire does not extend, as to time, beyond a few weeks, or, as to object, beyond the immediate fruit of plunder,—idleness and gross debauchery. We may be sure, therefore, that this class of citizens entertain no deep political projects.

Common thieves are used to consider themselves a body not merely apart from, but antagonist to, the rest of the community. To hear them talk, one would suppose that property exists only to be stolen, and that the main object of society is to harass thieves. Towards the laws which are intended to protect life and property they entertain what may be called a personal antipathy; so that they take delight in hurting others, even when the injury inflicted can produce no advantage to themselves. We may infer, consequently, that they would rejoice at an occasion which should give them power over the town, though only for one night, and that, in using such power, they would wreak a terrible vengeance on society, besides committing crimes for crime's sake.

Common thieves live in ceaseless fear: inevitably, then, they are of a cruel disposition. More-

over, as common thieves make a point of witnessing scenes of blood acted according to law—public executions, I mean, of their fellows and of women!—their tempers become pitiless and ferocious, like that of the tiger. We may be sure, therefore, that whatever their present design, it is free from all merciful considerations.

Now, the fact is, that, whenever of late there has appeared a prospect of political disturbance in London, the thieves have made ready to *sack the town*. This is their object. They want such a commotion as would divide the force of the government and render the laws powerless. They are longing for a state of things in which every man of property—his goods—his wife—and his daughters—should be placed at their mercy. Mercy!—but let the word pass. They wish for a disorganization of society, which should enable them to pluck sensual enjoyments in the midst of blood and fire. Reader, if you suspect this to be exaggeration, mind what lately happened at Bristol!

But the Bristol riots do not appear to have been the result of any organized design. At least, the Bristol destroyers did not pursue any plan similar to that which has been formed by the London thieves. In London a project of anarchy has been deliberately formed, and will, I doubt not, be steadily pursued, in case an opportunity for accomplishing it should occur. Here follow some of the calculations and details of the plan.

From the hour of the Duke of Wellington's declaration against Reform up to the change of ministry,—again, since impediments to the progress of the Reform-bill became the order of the day in the House of Commons,—and especially since the rejection of

that Bill by the House of Lords, the thieves have assumed that, whatever circumstances should cause a *large congregation of people in the streets*, would probably lead to a collision between the people and the government. They also assume that, in the common course of events, a large congregation of people in the streets must inevitably occur. If the King's intended visit to the city, last year, had taken place, the principal streets would have been filled with people; and, by stating what the thieves intended to do on that occasion, their plan for the future will be exposed.

1. They intended to call the rabble to their assistance, and then to unite their whole body, so increased, with such bodies of the workpeople and others as contemplated the overthrow of the government. It was understood, amongst the leaders, that at first there was to be no stealing; but that the thieves should heartily join any who were disposed to fight against the police or the soldiers. Of this I had some evidence. Though the King did not visit the city, a considerable body of thieves assembled at Temple-Bar, within the city jurisdiction and undisturbed by the city authorities. Through that gang I passed several times, and, though I saw boys picking each other's pockets, and had my own empty pockets frequently examined by boys, I observed that the *men* directed their whole attention to getting up a fight with a body of police stationed on the other side of Temple-Bar.

2. The more clever of the thieves—those who would have been leaders—were fully aware of the utility of barricades in any conflict between the populace and the government. Various histo-

ries of the Three Days in Paris had been greedily read by them; and though many of them, I know, found it hard to believe that the populace of Paris had abstained from violence to private persons and property, they were delighted with the discovery of a means by which, as the Edinburgh Review has clearly shown, any considerable number of resolute men, in any large metropolis, may dissolve any government not zealously supported by the middle class. In case, therefore, the King had entered the city, the thieves would have hastened to erect barricades in the principal thoroughfares.

3. Of course, no time would have been lost in attacking such prisons as were within the barricades, and letting loose their inmates to swell the number of the populace.

4. The thieves had a particular enmity to Sir Robert Peel, as the judge of last appeal in capital cases; and his doom was sealed. They thought little of the Duke of Wellington, except as the head of the government, whose death could not fail to promote confusion. I incline to think that they would not have harmed his Majesty; having observed amongst thieves (though this is not the occasion on which to account for it) a slavish feeling of abstract loyalty. At all events, the leaders expected that, if the troops should be beaten or rendered helpless by the barricades, the next day would present a scene of utter tumult and anarchy. Then was to have come the end—the sack of the town by an army of robbers.

In addition to the above statement, as applicable to the present state of London, it seems right to point out, judging from what has happened at Bristol, that plunder and rape would be succeeded by

fire as a means of concealing those crimes.

Secondly, of the rabble. Under this head I include a numerous body, of whom scarcely anything is known by "people of property and education," and least of all by the executive government. Specimens of this class of citizens may always be seen, and in perfection, on Sunday morning, in such lanes and alleys as branch off from both sides of Orchard-Street Westminster, or of Whitechapel; costermongers, drovers, slaughterers of cattle, knackers, dealers in dead bodies and dogs' meat, cads, brickmakers, chimney-sweepers, nightmen, scavengers, &c. &c. The misery, the barbarous ignorance, the last degradation of these poor people, and their constant intercourse with thieves, render them enemies of all law and order. They are the helots of society, and may be reckoned, within five miles of St. Paul's, at 50,000, on a very moderate computation. To these, as likely to prove a more effective force on the side of confusion and rapine than the same number of men, must be added 10,000 of the lowest class of prostitutes.

The rabble have had, and still have, but confused notions of the object and means of a rebellion. Their extreme ignorance and rudeness disqualify them from thinking on any subject; and such ideas as they form, it is very difficult to extract from them. What I know of them is, that they have a vague expectation of some great change which is to banish misery from the land; that, as far as their dull faculties permit, they share most of the ordinary sentiments of thieves towards the happy classes, and wish for a turn of affairs that should give power to their friends, the thieves.

And I believe of them, founding my belief on a knowledge of their wretchedness and deep debasement, that, if their wish should be accomplished, they would repeat on a proportionably larger scale, and, if more time were given, with added atrocities, the scenes of rapine, burning, and self-destruction in the phrenzy of drunkenness, lately exhibited at Bristol. In particular, I have lately observed that their conversation teems with expressions sounding of *destruction*. It would be difficult to repeat the words without exciting a misplaced smile, when the object is to make a correct and grave impression; but I may add, that on the Wednesday succeeding the rejection of the Reform-Bill by the House of Lords, a friend of mine, once a working-man himself, but now an enlightened distinguished friend of the poor, who, like me, had been walking amidst the rabble, agreed with me in opinion that, on that day the organ of destructiveness had been largely developed.

The women classed with the rabble deserve a separate, though it shall be a brief notice.

Foreigners coming to this religious country, when, impelled by a curiosity that seldom troubles any of our higher orders, they plunge into the haunts of misery and vice, become astonished at the number and degradation of a certain class of Englishwomen. They ought rather to wonder at our ignorance of what they learn; since one can more easily account for the melancholy fact than explain why it should be hidden from those who, as the makers of our laws and customs, are responsible for its existence. The causes of this evil are many. If any one would ascertain them, let him visit the spots where the evil exists, such for example as the

low parts of Westminster; but I may as well add, that if he go with a shovel hat, picking his way through the filth on the points of his toes, and flourishing a perfumed handkerchief to escape cholera or what not, he will learn absolutely nothing. One cause of the evil in question must be stated here:—it is the number of soldiers always quartered in London. Now this circumstance is mentioned for the purpose of explaining, that between the class of women under notice and what are called the Household Troops, there subsists an intimate connexion. If those women should take part in a tumult, would the soldiers shoot at them or cut them down? If not, the women would be a shield to their other friends, the thieves and rabble. The government must know that the question just asked has been put hypothetically to many soldiers within the last year, and by those too whom the question most nearly concerns. A relative of mine heard it put, on the Sunday after the rejection of the reform-bill by the lords, to a soldier *on duty*; and the indirect but edifying answer was—"Why, the king is for the bill, and the commons is for the bill, and the people is for the bill, —why should the lords be agin it?" I pretend not to know how the soldiers would decide the question practically; but every one who believes that soldiers are men, may doubt whether they would fire more than once. If they would not fire a second time, after having slept on the slaughter of a few of their mistresses, we are discussing a question of time only; and as the refusal of one troop or company to fire at command must place the soldiers on the side of the mob, we may conclude that, twenty-four hours sooner or later, the government would be overturned;

—provided always, that this class of women should take part in an insurrection, and should not be driven back to their dens by the first fire of their lovers.

That they would take part in an insurrection I have little doubt, when reflecting on their abject misery, the cruel treatment which they frequently endure, the ignominy and complete hopelessness of their condition, and their consequent hatred of happier women and of themselves. As it is, they destroy their own lives by drinking to drown care:—what should prevent them from playing the part of furies in a civil commotion? And it is not probable, to say the least, that beings so desperate at all times, should, when in a state of peculiar inflammation, be alarmed by witnessing a few deaths. I need not repeat the conclusion.

The power and projects of the desperadoes are to be next considered.

Resorting once more to classification, I must draw a clear distinction between the desperadoes and the great bulk of the working class. The frequenters of the Rotunda are few in number: every where the working class constitutes a vast majority of the people. The working class of London, so far as I know them, are most anxious that the reform bill should pass; expecting that it will produce further reform, if needful, and, finally, legislation in which the advantage of the many shall be consulted:—whereas the frequenters of the Rotunda dread nothing more than the passing of that bill, which they perceive would be fatal to their hopes. A great number of the working class are householders, who, though their property in chattels be small, own wives and children as precious as those of the richest lords; wives that love and

children that prattle, like the women and children of Grosvenor-Square:—whereas most of the Rotunda people are loose single men, living here and there in lodgings, who might set fire to London without anxiety for helpless beings at home. The best informed, steadiest, and most virtuous of the working class have characters to lose, which most of the Rotunda people have not. Great numbers of the working class are anxious to improve their knowledge:—nearly all the Rotunda people think that they have nothing more to learn. A majority of the Rotunda people are admirers of Mr. Hunt; while crowds of the working class suspect that he is employed and paid by the anti-reformers, to make mischief and save Old Sarum. Further points of distinction, or rather of opposition, might be named; but these must suffice.

Considering that a majority of the working class had, last year, made up their minds to fight for reform, and that not a few had provided arms for that purpose; considering the unhappy, anxious condition of the working class generally throughout London, the destitution that reigns in Spital-fields, the joy with which this class received a promise of reform, and the sickness of the heart that attends hope long delayed;—considering the extraordinary pains taken by ministers to spread Rotunda doctrines, by sympathizing with their enemies and neglecting their friends; by half promising and yet withholding a repeal of the tax which compels working men to read cheap trash, if any thing; by one unsuccessful and fourteen successful prosecutions of the press and in various other ways too numerous to be mentioned;—considering also the zeal of the anti-re-

formers in exciting the physical force against the government;—taking all these things into consideration, it is truly wonderful that so few of the working class should have joined the Rotunda party. Obscure men struggling with adversity and resisting manifold inducements to go wrong, are more worthy of respect than the prosperous great. Honor to the working class!—Now for the desperadoes.

They may be divided into two classes, which I shall designate as *Huntites* and *Owenites*. When distinguished from the rabble, of whom many shout “Hunt for ever!” in the streets, and some attend the Rotunda on great occasions, they do not comprise, I verily believe, 1000 persons. But, as will be seen presently, they are not the less dangerous on account of the smallness of their number.

The Huntites, though more numerous than the Owenites, are a set of poor creatures, about whom, certainly, it would not be worth while to write a pamphlet, if they had not been mixed up with the others. But few of them are regular workmen: they work off and on in a slovenly way: as workmen they are careless and inert: they are addicted to gossip and dram-sipping, and are therefore miserably poor. Most of them with whom I have conversed are persons of a naturally weak intellect; having deficient foreheads and a sinister expression; being noisy, egotistical, boastful; yet given to lamentation, and afraid of their own shadows. They are addle-headed. I once asked a thorough-going Huntite what was his object. He answered—a republic, with Henry Hunt for president, by means of universal suffrage, annual parliaments, and vote by ballot; but when told that I had been deterred from opposing his president at the last election

for Preston, only by want of the ballot to protect from the rabble those who might have voted for me, he could not be made to understand that the ballot would shield voters from more than one sort of influence. Such is the stupidity of these self-styled radicals. They wish, indeed, for a state of things which would give importance to noisy tongues in empty heads, and they urge others to rebel; but if a rebellion should take place, they would keep clear of it; abusing those who had begun it if it failed; and, if it were successful, claiming the honour of the day. As for the means, scope, and ends of a revolution, either patriotic or despotic, these they are incapable of comprehending. Ignorant, common-place, wrong-headed, fretful, vain, mean, malignant, and cowardly, they follow a fit leader, and would be merely despicable, if accident had not connected them with men of quite another stamp.

These are the Owenites of the Rotunda. They are bent on the overthrow of all existing laws, with a view to the formation of a "new state of society," in which there should subsist either a perfect equality of property, or rather no property at all, as we use the word, but a community of goods. What they want in numbers, they make up by furious zeal and undoubted boldness. In conjunction with the Huntites they support more than one weekly journal, in which the debates of the Rotunda are systematically reported. Spread all over the town, they are, most of them, sober men, who maintain themselves by industry; and they are, I believe, honest in their private dealings, as well as worthy of respect on public grounds, in so far as the end they have in view is the happiness of all, and as they

conscientiously suppose the means which they contemplate using to be justified by the greatness of their object. Truly they are fanatics,—in a religion, of which the essence is the salvation of mankind in this world. In opinion followers of Mr. Robert Owen, one of the most just and benevolent of men, in temper they resemble the party of whigs, whom Sir Walter Scott has represented as about to immolate their leader, Morton, after the rout of Bothwell Brigg. Mr. Owen would not hurt a fly; he blesses those who revile him; and his sole arm is gentle persuasion. These people, on the contrary, would sacrifice the world for their object. Yet they are Owenites,—men of scanty knowledge; utterly impracticable; filled full of one great prejudice; unreasoning and unreasonable; not selfish, nor even thoughtful of such interests as commonly occupy mankind, but incessantly dwelling on an abstract proposition, and endeavouring to force circumstances, which, by their own creed are declared out of man's controul, into agreement with their singular purpose. About a year ago I met several of them headed by Mr. Owen, for the purpose of discussing a suggestion, which had for object the benefit of the working class; and it was expressly stipulated on my part, and agreed to by the Owenites, that, on this occasion, "the science of society," or, in other words, Mr. Owen's peculiar views, should not be made a topic of discourse. As well might water have engaged to run up hill. During the four or five hours that the meeting lasted, Mr. Owen and most of his disciples, some of whom are now leaders at the Rotunda, talked continually of the science of society, and met every statement, proposition or argument, founded

on the state of things that has so long prevailed in this world, by some offspring of their own imaginations merely. The Owenites of the Rotunda are not cruel; but I mistake them, if they would not destroy the existing race of men, in order to replace it by another which should condemn the institution of property. They are not vindictive; but God forbid they should ever have the power to harm those who oppose their views! In manner they are rather gentle than rough; but touch one of them on his tender point;—only say that you think the stimulus of competition indispensable to the production of wealth;—and he will either turn from you in scorn, or, may be, tell you, with flashing eyes, that you are paid by the government to talk nonsense. Any thing like a compromise is what annoys them even more than decided opposition. Admit that the law of primogeniture is unfair, that settlements of property on the unborn injure society, and that real estates ought to be subject to simple contract debts;—make these concessions to an Owenite of the Rotunda, and he will accuse you of wishing to uphold an abominable system by affecting to improve it. All reform of Parliament short of universal suffrage, whereby he imagines that the new state of society might be brought about, he calls a cheat. This, it will be observed, is the main point of agreement between the Huntites and Owenites of the Rotunda. With the latter, education is a teaching of errors, books are worse than useless, and knowledge is ignorance. Whatever has existed, or does exist, is bad; and nothing good can be, till society shall have been first dissolved, and then reconstructed on the cooperative principle. As

they are uncharitable to those who dissent from them, so they would bear pain for conscience sake without a murmur. Nay, many of them, I feel assured, would be proud to suffer death for their opinions; but then, for the sake of those cherished opinions, they would profusely shed the blood of others. In a word, they are fanatics, wanting persecution only to be made powerful; and were they powerful, like most persecuted enthusiasts who have attained power they would become remorseless tyrants.

Such men are not to be despised. When the opportunity for action shall come, they will not be found deficient in courage. Many of them are provided with arms;\* and they will use their arms, when they think the occasion fit, without hesitation. Let me not be understood to accuse them of thirsting for blood. They will not kill for killing sake. They have a grand object in view, even though it be impracticable, and they are men of undaunted mind; that is all. If an insurrection of the London populace should take place, they will be found at the most dangerous posts, leading the thieves and rabble, pointing out the most effectual measures, and dying, if the lot fall on them, with cries of defiance. In this respect they greatly differ from the thieves and Huntites, who, if the latter appear at all, will sneak behind the barricades, and pick off the soldiers from a distance. The fanatical Owenites, on the contrary, long to come to close quarters with the "man butchers," as they call the troops: they have inflamed them-

\* That may be said of other people who look forward to a government of the sword.

selves into the belief that a good cause is stronger than practice and discipline. These will be the fighting men of our revolution, if we must have one.

In another respect the Rotunda Owenites differ altogether from the thieves. They would not rob as thieves rob, though they could do so with perfect impunity; and they would strive, I am confident, to prevent the thieves from burning private houses, or abusing terrified females. The robbery which they propose to commit, is an equal division of property; and to that end they consider anarchy as only a step,—as the only step: whereas the end of the thieves is anarchy. The distinction may not be worth much; but I point it out in justice to the Owenites.

Another distinction must be noticed for a different reason. The Rotunda Owenites, looking far beyond London and the present, and necessarily acquainted with the condition of the labouring class, who form the great body of the people, attach the highest importance to the destruction of credit and trade. With this view they have, at various times, entertained the following propositions:—

1. That the destruction of the Post Office would produce the best effects in the country, by stopping the transmission of letters, and convincing people at a distance that the capital was revolutionized.

2. That the destruction of the Bank, and especially of the dividend books, would spread alarm and confusion through the land, besides convincing the numerous holders of small accounts of stock, that they had nothing to save by supporting the government. Ministers know, of course, whether there be two sets of Bank dividend books; and they ought to know that inquiries have been made

lately with a view to ascertain that point, as well as the place in which the second set, if there be one, is deposited.

3. That the destruction of Doctors' Commons would unsettle property to such a degree as to render the best title difficult of proof, and would therefore facilitate the formation of a state of society in which property should be in common.

4. That the destruction of deeds in banking houses and lawyers' chambers, as well as of parish registers, would promote the same end.

5. That, in order to bring about a division of property with the least bloodshed, it would be just and humane to take hostages from the wealthy; such as their wives and children. It is to be hoped that, before this project is executed, the equal-property men in London may have got possession of the Tower, and that the female hostages will be there secured from the thieves and rabble.

Suppose the two first only of these speculations reduced to practice, viz. the destruction of the Post Office and dividend books,—what could in that case prevent a state of anarchy of longer or shorter duration? In that case assuredly credit, and trade, and even the currency of bank-notes, would stop. Put an end—never mind by what means—to the currency of bank-notes, and you not only throw out of employment thousands, one may say moderately, millions, of work-people, but you stop the markets of food in the great towns. If ever cause produced effect, that would be the consequence of those events; and it is equally plain that those events might easily occur in case of a serious tumult. Let us confine our attention to London. Stop the markets of



food in this great "hive of industry," and you reduce at least a million of people to the point of starvation. In such a state of things it would not be dishonest in any man to seize food wherever he could lay his hands on it. In such a state of things, therefore, the great mass of the work-people, who at present have no sympathy with thieves or anarchists, must have recourse to plunder. When they had consumed all the dry provisions in London, they must resort to liquid stimulants; and then—but before then the householders would have suffered whatever evil the populace might be inclined to inflict on them. Though we may not believe that out of such chaos a co-operative society would be formed, the most efficient of the desperado party think otherwise, and to this end of all things madly look as a means of conferring happiness on the world.

Of every design the time chosen for putting it in execution is an important ingredient. We have seen that the populace—thieves, rabble, and desperadoes,—are bent on producing a state of anarchy. But, as far as I know, they have not fixed on the moment when action shall take the place of speculation. Some imagine that they intended to strike a blow the other day, in case the projected meeting in White-Conduit-fields had been held. I cannot think so meanly of their judgment. Suppose that the meeting had been held—why, the government would have been in possession of the town, with full notice, and might easily have kept the populace out of it, perhaps by means of those very barricades on which the latter reckon as their chief instrument. May we not rather suspect that the White-Conduit-fields' meeting was projected merely for the purpose

of bringing together a large body of the working class, and identifying them with the desperadoes of the Rotunda? The only chance for the anarchists of every description—thieves, rabble, Huntites, and Owenites—is a congregation of themselves *in the streets*, on some lawful occasion, such as a King's visit to the City or an illumination for His Majesty's birthday, when a struggle must begin with nine points of the law in favour of the populace. To go out of a town of which you wish to take possession, into the fields from which you might find it difficult to return, would be a very foolish mode of proceeding. Of this the Rotunda chiefs are well convinced (except, perhaps, some of the Huntites, who are fit only for leading others into a scrape); and they expect nothing from any congregation outside of the town. What then is their design as to time?—It is, like that of the thieves, to wait for a favourable opportunity *within the town*; an opportunity which, in the nature of things, must occur before long.

I am not prophesying a revolution. A short period of anarchy might not produce a revolution. Nor do I assert that anarchy is inevitable. I have only stated what I believe to be the present designs and means of about 90,000 people, who are bent on mischief; and from that statement I draw only this moderate conclusion,—that the householders of London are in danger from the populace.

This conclusion is not less trite than true; for nearly every house-

\* It is proper to acquit Mr. Wakley, who was to have presided at the meeting, of connection with the desperadoes, even to the extent of being totally unacquainted with their projects.

holder has said as much to his neighbour often and often during the last year. But the facts on which the conclusion is built are here placed in a novel light. One fact noticed—the excitement and uncertainty of all householders, whether reformers or anti-reformers,—has prevented them from arranging the other facts, so as to feel the full force of the conclusion, at which, nevertheless, they had arrived, as it were instinctively. An arrangement of the facts is presented to them. By classification, a line, broad, distinct, and palpable, has been drawn between the populace and the householders. By arrangement, the precise nature of the danger to which the latter are exposed is ascertained. Every one who may do me the honour to read these pages, though he may have admitted before that the householders are in danger from the populace, may now see more clearly in what that danger consists. If a householder, he will no longer be tormented with a vague, however just, apprehension. He will duly appreciate the evil that threatens him; and all that on him depends for averting it—for rendering his property secure, and saving his wife and children—he will perform, without delay, if he have the spirit of a man.

What are his means of defence ?

Considering that the danger rests on the concurrence of two events—great political excitement, and a large congregation of people in the street—some may incline to think that the passing of the Reform Bill would, by quelling political excitement, render the householders secure. But on what grounds is it supposed that political excitement would cease with the passing of the Reform Bill ? If that Bill were passed to-morrow, it would still be only words upon

paper. An act of Parliament for Reform is but a means to certain ends. Conclude that the ends, if accomplished, would satisfy all, and place us in a state of happy repose—still a long time must elapse before that result could take place. Meanwhile, for some years to come, the many practical questions affecting many interests, that would be a consequence of Reform, must inevitably maintain a high degree of political excitement.

“ Then,” exclaims a householder who is frightened out of his senses—“ fling away the Reform Bill; and let us return to the state in which we were before the late French revolution !” Softly, my friend ! You must go farther back ; you must deal with France as well as England ; you must perform a miracle besides. Undo all that, by means of education, has been done with the public mind of England and Scotland during thirty years ; restore Charles X. to his throne ; revive the old French monarchy, so that France may no longer set England an example of democratic progress ; above all, bury in oblivion whatever has been said and written of the British House of Commons since last March ;—take every one of these precautions, and you may, perhaps, fling away the Reform Bill without danger. To fling away the Reform Bill, not first accomplishing all these impossibilities, would be to increase, when your object was to allay, political excitement. I need not dwell, therefore, on the new elements of danger to the peaceful householders, which would be brought forward by a futile attempt to place us as we were in July 1830 : but I am led just to point at one of them ; namely, civil war, the government on one side, the people on the other, with,

from time to time, here and there, the populace at the head of affairs.

Pass the Bill or fling it away—let who may be minister—political excitement is not to be avoided. Is it possible to prevent people from congregating in the streets?

No—is the short, plain, conclusive answer. But may not the executive government protect the householders from the populace?

The barricades have not been tried in England,—therefore we may doubt on this point. Besides, in civil conflicts, hired soldiers are apt to take either side. At best, they are not to be depended on; and, at the worst, they would make nice protectors of our wives and daughters.

The police force?

The populace once roused would sweep away a few thousand constables, as the Atlantic is said to have brushed off Mrs. Partington of Sidmouth. The policemen are wiser than Mrs. Partington:—though excellent at a row, they know that they could do nothing with an insurrection. If, indeed, a policeman, armed with a musket, were domesticated in every house, the householders would be safe—perfectly safe. But it would be to the muskets, not to the policemen, that they would owe their safety. This method, however, of doubling the number of householders for the sake of arming half of them, is, of course, out of the question, by reason of its enormous expense. What remains?

The householders remain! Guns are obtainable. They sell them at Birmingham for about twenty shillings a-piece. Put a householder and a gun together, and the householder is safe. The householders of London must be informed, that guns do not go off of their own accord. If every householder had a gun under his roof,—(he need

not touch it till he had become familiar with it, if ever,)—the power of the populace would be extinct. Their power consists, not in numbers,—for they are few as compared with the householders,—but in confidence. They despise the police, and expect either to seduce or to beat the soldiers. They expect to plunder the householders; as well they may, since not a precaution has been taken to disappoint them. *If there were a gun in every house of any one street, into that street neither thieves, nor rabble, nor even desperadoes would enter for the purpose of violence.* What is true of one street may be applied to the whole town, and with greater force, since many safe streets would be safer than one. If there were guns in every street and square, the populace would never even congregate for the purpose of injuring the householders. They might still meet to quarrel with the police or fight the soldiers; but this is not probable, because their object is anarchy and plunder, which would be out of the question, IF EVERY HOUSEHOLDER WERE KNOWN TO POSSESS A GUN. Though thieves may not, like some of the householders, fancy that guns are alive and naturally mischievous, they do not at all like to look at them. I know these people well, and am satisfied that they would never trouble the householders to use their guns; provided, that is, they were made aware that every householder had a gun to use in case of need. As for the poor rabble, they would, at all events, do whatever the thieves did: to armed householders, therefore, they would be not merely harmless, but, as occasion offered and in their rude way, actually respectful. If the householders were to obtain guns, the Huntites would complain of course; but I

suspect that, in their hearts, they would not regret a circumstance which must render impossible any trial of their boasted courage. If the householders were to obtain guns, many of the Rotunda Owenites would go near to die of vexation. In that case their occupation would be gone. Altogether, the measure, being easy of execution, is thoroughly adapted to the end proposed by it, viz. the removal of all danger to the householders.

The details of the plan are few. Nothing is more simple than to buy a gun. Some concert amongst the householders would be desirable, not for the purpose of obtaining guns, but in order to give publicity to the fact that guns had been obtained. Mock guns would suffice, if you could but make the populace believe that they were real ones. Powder and ball are required only for show. Not to scare the women, (who, by the way, have a deeper interest in this affair than the men,) let the flints be of wood: but keep the secret. For the perfect safety of factories, brewhouses, banks, printing offices, and large warehouses, it would be right to provide guns bearing some proportion in number to the workmen and clerks employed under each roof. And perhaps the richer householders, who have most property to save by this means, would subscribe to furnish with muskets those poorer householders, who belong to the working class and cannot well afford an outlay even for the protection of their wives and children. By some arrangement or other, the arming should be general amongst the householders; for, by drawing distinctions here, you would create disunion whilst your object was force. Be it remem-

bered that, if arms were given to all the thieves, all the rabble, and all the desperadoes, still, if all the householders had arms at the same time, they would be infinitely more secure than they are at this moment when no one class is armed.

The plan appears open to but one objection that deserves an answer. The householders might, not now, but some day or other, turn their arms against the government! Not, one should think, unless the government turned its arms against them, in which case the government ought to be treated as a robber. But it could never come to this pass; because, if the plan were adopted in London, it would become a national measure, and all householders would be armed:—that is to say, the formation of a government disposed to turn its arms against the householders would be rendered impossible. Guns are respectable things, and would impart respectability to those who possessed them. The government of an armed people must be a government, for the people, not against them. One cannot, therefore, imagine a case in which an armed people should come into collision with its government.

But this is a civic, I had almost said a domestic, rather than a political question. Let the Whigs stay or the Tories come—there must be a populace for many years; and so long as there shall be, also, political excitement, the householders must be in danger from the populace, unless this precaution against anarchy and rapine be adopted. Whilst I write, the danger is urgent. Fore-warned is said to be fore-armed; and the householders of Bristol testify that prevention is better than cure.

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